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*Faculty of Humanities*

**Dissertation summary**

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**The rhetorical roots of language cultivation**

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Budapest, 2018

## 1. Introduction

Throughout its many thousand years of history, language has undergone dramatic changes. The presumably closely related origins of language and culture are obscured in mystery. Broadly speaking (and, of course, there is no consensus about this), the several-million-year-long evolution of humans appears to have made a “sudden leap” around a hundred thousand years ago, and this seems to be somehow related to the emergence of language which, in turn, brought about increased “cultural” development. From that time on, the main trends of language development can be deduced relatively safely. Linguistic change, similarly to technological change, is based on some kind of innovation: a sound, a word, an expression is no longer sufficient for accurately expressing an intention, so it needs to be improved. However, behind a change like this there is always a linguistic fact that triggered the change.

According to Michael Tomasello (2002: 47), humans are not only subject to biological evolution but they also operate and maintain a so-called cumulative cultural evolution. In essence, cumulative cultural evolution means innovation and learning (through teaching) which form part of a dialectical process where “one step follows from another”. The theory in short: human cultural traditions accumulate changes creating a cultural history in which each generation passes on their knowledge to the next generation whose members preserve it and modify it if necessary (Tomasello 2002: 47). Tomasello refers to this process as the “ratchet effect”. Thus, biological evolution (development through natural selection) is most probably accelerated by cumulative cultural evolution enhanced by language, and, according to American philosopher Daniel Dennett, is just about to change up the gears again – reaching “intelligent design”. This also means that we have to pay even more attention to languages, their condition and development than ever before (Dennett 2017).

Language is also part, in fact the engine, of cumulative cultural evolution: its users (speakers) sometimes encounter problems which cannot be solved with the available linguistic tools. In this case one or more users examine the tool looking for the original purpose behind it, and then modify it so as to meet the new requirements. The shocking part is that the members of the group do not have to be physically present for this as virtual cooperation is enough – especially in today’s age of the internet. Thus, similarly to mathematics, linguistic change is an integral part of the so-called sociogenesis (Tomasello 2002: 49).

In the light of this, it is interesting to think about what happens when people seemingly argue against change. This attitude from the outside may look as if it goes against cultural evolution. Naturally, there will always be people who challenge this “in spite of everything” (such as linguistic purists), a sober mind, however, looks for more (and uses appropriate style): to identify fallacies which disregard the foundations of cumulative cultural evolution, i.e. that new knowledge builds on existing knowledge. So, if someone argues for a change while (deliberately or ignorantly) disregarding accumulated knowledge, he is making a mistake. And anyone warning him of this strives to sustain cultural evolution.

If cultural evolution is projected to language, it is apparent that language is characterised by two counteracting processes. One is manifested in the continuous renewal of the language, the other in the preservation of old forms (suffixes, words, expressions) and in an attitude toward new forms that involves interest, criticism, observation, description and sometimes rejection (Fábián 1984). Language cultivation monitors – and evaluates – changing linguistic phenomena and is quick to respond to novelties. Thus, it is not only worthwhile but also necessary to speak about linguistic cultivation.

In Hungary the movement character of language cultivation, the question of thinking about language and the various approaches to examining language all make language cultivation an important factor, as the most heated debates are usually about who and what do “language cultivators” want to cultivate?, is it good and necessary to intervene in linguistic processes, and if so, how?, are speakers discriminated or helped by disapproving certain linguistic forms? etc. However, in many cases it is not even clear what makes a language cultivator.

My dissertation sets out to identify the rhetorical roots of language cultivation: how the still existing expectations of proper language use and educated speech were born and managed to persist in the culture of humanity. Are these expectations and ideas really valid at all? The dissertation examines the origins and roots of language cultivation and its continuation in education, rhetoric textbooks, guides to proper language use, grammars, religious practice and daily life from the ancient Greeks to the present day. The starting point will be a long-established and still influential craft: rhetoric. My argument will focus on the interpretations, role and place of rhetoric in the emerging and ever-changing discipline of linguistics and in applied linguistics born in the late 19th century, and will explore and explain rhetorical

phenomena in the forms of activity referred to as language cultivation today. Rhetoric is a discipline which takes a whole person and which can teach us more not only about others but also about ourselves.

## **2. Material and method**

The dissertation first reviews the centuries of literature on rhetoric relating to language cultivation using a critical philological method. This effort is based on the stylistic theory of the rhetoric of Aristotle, Cornificius, Cicero and Quintilian, and on Pseudo-Longinus' *On the sublime*. A similar approach is used for analysing rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The works of Augustine of Hippo, Isidore of Seville, Alcuin of York and John of Salisbury are examined to reveal how their teachings and methods were influenced by classical rhetoric. These authors were selected because they examined language from a rhetorical perspective so they were presumably affected by classical theories.

Then the focus will be shifted to the rhetorical aspects of Hungarian language cultivation by collecting with the critical philological method the characteristics of language cultivation activities having rhetorical relevance between the 16th and 19th centuries from the works of Imre Pécseli Király, István Geleji Katona, József Szvorényi and Lajos Szeberényi. In relation to the works of Zsigmond Simonyi and Mór Kármán my argument is that the rhetorical mindset completely permeated the structure of teaching Hungarian language and literature in schools. Importantly, to get an insight into the attitude of tribal communities and religions to sophisticated language use, this chapter also reviews the relevant literature in anthropological linguistics. The multiple shifts in direction of Hungarian language cultivation in the 20th and 21st centuries are analysed through the works of Lajos Lőrincze, László Grétsy, Géza Balázs and Gábor Kemény.

It is the topic of the dissertation that calls for a critical philological approach: the rhetorical roots of language cultivation can only be observed and the hypotheses tested by means of the available literature.

The last chapters of the dissertation present the findings of two empirical (database) analyses. The first analysis is a preliminary one conducted on the database of the Linguistics Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) compiled in 1964. It is based on *Nyelvművelő levelek* (Letters on language cultivation), a collection edited by Géza Ferenczy and Éva Ruzsiczky (Gondolat, Budapest, 1964). My corpus was compiled from the 450 questions and answers included in this collection.

The second analysis examined the questions received and the answers given by the Office of Hungarian Language Services (Magyar Nyelvi Szolgáltató Iroda, Manyszi) using a qualitative-quantitative method. The quantitative analysis was performed through the administration centre (WordPress) of Manyszi's website ([www.e-nyelv.hu](http://www.e-nyelv.hu)).

The qualitative analysis was based on the first 10,000 questions of the linguistic consultation service offered by Manyszi, categorised and reviewed in an Excel table with the help of Manyszi interns.

### **3. Objectives and hypotheses**

#### **a. Analysis using the method of critical philology**

##### **i. From antiquity to the Renaissance**

The analysis aims to demonstrate the rhetoric roots of language developing and enriching activities in the antiquity, and to present stylistic virtues as discussed by the stylistic theories of classical rhetoric. It is also an aim to demonstrate that modern language cultivation can be traced back to the classical authors' descriptive, observing and educational activities intended to improve the linguistic quality and awareness of speaker apprentices at the time.

The first hypothesis assumes that the basic principles of sophisticated and proper language use are included in the part of rhetoric works which discusses *elocutio* (style, elaboration), and can be linked to the doctrine of stylistic virtues, particularly to proper language use.

The second hypothesis states that classical rhetoric continued to play an important role in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well, only it took a new form: it was applied in new areas after the fall of the Roman Empire, such as in the rhetoric and education of the Church and the etiquette of court life.

The third hypothesis is that works written in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are evidently related to the stylistic theories of classical rhetoric, in particular proper language use which is assumed to have played a central role in all rhetorical writings.

## **ii. Rhetoric and language cultivation in Hungary in the 16th–19th centuries**

The analysis tries to demonstrate the language improvement activities in Hungary from the 16th century, with special regard to contemporary grammars and rhetorical works; to present the relationship with classical rhetoric works; and to illustrate the impact of rhetorical thinking on the organisation of education in the 19th century.

The first hypothesis here is that the requirements of sophisticated language use determined by classical rhetoric can be found in the grammars and guides to proper language use published in Hungary (assuming that there will be correspondence between the types of errors and similarity between advices).

The second hypothesis states that rhetoric does not only influence language use but also the organisation of science (e.g. in education) by considering gradualism, the synthesis of knowledge and language skills.

## **iii. Rhetoric and language cultivation – The place of language cultivation in the area of linguistic actions**

The analysis aims to find and strengthen the place of language cultivation in the area of linguistic actions, examine the anthropological roots of the efforts toward educated speech, and give an overview of the major shifts in directions of Hungarian language cultivation in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The first hypothesis assumes that language cultivation is not only present in literate societies, but there are characteristics regulating language use even in tribal cultures.

The second hypothesis is that by the 21st century language cultivation has returned to the starting point: the question of style. This hypothesis is based on the term “style-centred language cultivation”.

## **b. Analysis of a folkloristic linguistic database I – Preliminary analysis**

The analysis aims to provide a preliminary insight into the language-related questions people asked from the HAS Linguistics Research Institute. The findings of the first analysis is expected to support the findings of the second one.

The first hypothesis is that questions relating to proper language use (including in particular word use) will be the most dominant group in the corpus. My assumption is based on the fact that the vocabulary is the most dynamically changing component of language. “This is partly due to the fact that, of the various subsystems of a language, words are connected the most closely to the life of the speaker community, and they are the most exposed to changes in material and intellectual culture, economy and society.” (Gerstner 2006: 437).

The second hypothesis of the analysis states that a large number of questions will concern spelling issues. Today spelling is often mixed up with language (“the trap of writing”), probably because it has been closely related to linguistic awareness from the early days of literacy: people dealt with language when they had to write. From the antiquity to the Enlightenment writing only mattered to scribes, schoolmasters and priests and to people who wanted to learn or teach reading and writing (Nádasdy 2006b: 913). Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* also dedicated a separate chapter to spelling which claimed that good writing skills are essential for writing and delivering speech. Later rhetoric characteristics became important when reading out texts in monasteries.

The third hypothesis is that the questions will somehow reflect the attitude toward the given linguistic phenomenon of the people asking them. Experience has shown that people often express their feelings about the phenomena asked: they find them “annoying”, “upsetting” or “irritating” and expect the linguist to resolve the conflict (whether intrapersonal or interpersonal). Although the questions were edited before publication, I assume that the questions can be analysed in terms of attitudes.

### **c. Analysis of a folkloristic linguistic database II**

#### **i. Quantitative analysis**

The analysis aims to draw practical consequences from the massive amount of data that have accumulated at the Office of Hungarian Language Services during its history of over a decade, and to demonstrate that people are interested in linguistic advices.

The first hypothesis here is that intensity of questions will continuously increase for an indefinite period of time.

The second hypothesis assumes that the intensity of questions will reach a maximum and stabilise at a constant level.

The third hypothesis states that certain periods of the year are more popular for understandable reasons.

## **ii. Qualitative analysis**

The analysis aims to show the distribution of the questions among linguistic categories.

The first hypothesis here is that the majority of questions in the database relate to spelling issues. This assumption is based on my experience and observations as office manager and linguistic consultant.

The second hypothesis states that non-spelling related questions will be dominated by questions on proper language use. My assumption is that they can be divided into questions on word usage and sentence construction, and into further categories in line with the problems defined in the literature of language cultivation (e.g. Adamikné 2013).

The third hypothesis is that a part of the questions can be examined in terms of rhetoric design and can be linked not only to proper language use but also to the stylistic virtues of appropriacy and clarity (i.e. linguistic manners), such as in the case of addressing others in oral or written communication.

The fourth hypothesis assumes that certain questions are regularly searched by visitors to the website. My experience shows that certain topics (such as confusable words or the *j* vs *ly* problem) are surrounded by a high degree of uncertainty and language users want to get quick help with them, preferably online.

The fifth hypothesis is that, similarly to the preliminary analysis, the formulation of certain questions will reveal the attitude of the persons asking them.

## **4. Results**

The critical philological method revealed that classical rhetoric works – although to different degrees – do discuss stylistic virtues, including in particular proper language use. While Aristotle defined only five criteria for proper language use, Quintilian divided potential errors of language use into two larger groups – *solecism* (the transgression of grammatical rules) and *barbarism* (the use of a non-standard word) – and set separate requirements for them.



The analyses also made it clear that solecisms and barbarisms still exist. Qualitative database analyses performed in relation to the Hungarian language have shown that these two types of mistakes are the most frequent sources of uncertainty for language users even today. Spelling related issues also form a large part of the questions. This is probably due to the fact that spelling has high authority and the average language user considers it as an inseparable part of language. The analysis of the databases clearly confirmed that there is still demand for language cultivation and the dissemination of linguistic knowledge in the 21st century.

The database analysis comprised two stages. In the first stage the serial number and the title of the questions (sometimes the question itself, if it was identical with the title) published in *Nyelvművelő levelek* were recorded in an Excel table and tagged with a label. The label corresponded to the type of problem addressed in the question. The questions published in the book were largely organised thematically (thanks to the editors), which made the classification of the words much easier. The classification revealed the types of linguistic issues which concerned people writing letters to the Linguistic Research Institute in the 1950s and 1960s.

The results could be used for the second analysis which focused on the question-answer database of the Office of Hungarian Language Services – first for the purposes of a qualitative analysis. The questions were collected on the website of the Office. The operation of the website is as follows: Every question submitted on the [www.e-nyelv.hu](http://www.e-nyelv.hu) website is displayed on an administration screen that can only be accessed by language consultants. The on-duty language consultant logs in and answers the pending questions. By default the system records all answers in a database with the category label “linguistic advice” to separate them from other types of content on the website (news, images, events etc.). The entries can be listed broken down by month making it easier to search for older questions and count questions in a given month. The qualitative analysis of the database confirmed the results of the first analysis: questions relating to sentence structure and word use were represented in large numbers, but most of them related to spelling.

The review of the literature showed that language cultivation is connected to language planning and language policy. The precursors of language policy can already be found in the Roman Empire which introduced central measures to standardise the Latin language and thus increase its prestige. The trends and results of the standardisation of Latin is summarised below in table 1.

trends		results/consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>linguistic economy</i>: reduction of linguistic variants;</li> <li>- <i>linguistic accuracy</i>: promotion of careful word choice;</li> <li>- <i>linguistic transparency</i>: selection between shorter and longer verb forms;</li> <li>- <i>linguistic consistency and reasonability</i>: “simplification” of linguistic exceptions and special solutions</li> </ul>	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- creation of a uniform standard language (more standardised than the Greek which had multiple standards: Ionic choral poetry, Aeolic lyric poetry etc.);</li> <li>- the standard remained in full conformity with the <i>consuetudo</i> (i.e. the linguistic custom) and not even the <i>ratio grammatica</i> (i.e. the standard) could gain absolute authority over it;</li> <li>- although according to Tolcsvai (1998) Romans had a more prescriptive approach to linguistic norm than Greeks, this had fewer practical implications;</li> <li>- Quintilian was also in favour of changes but called for moderation.</li> </ul>

1. table: Trends and results of the standardisation of Latin

After the fall of the Roman Empire, rhetoric lived on in the educational practice of the Church, and later in the Renaissance era it became an important instrument in court life education.

In Hungary linguistic standardisation started in the 16th century and was significantly influenced by the emergence of the national language in the wake of the Reformation and later the Counter-Reformation. Between the 16th and 19th centuries many guides to proper language use and rhetoric works were published based on the classical traditions. This is clearly shown by their structure as well as their focus on proper language use. Rhetorical thinking also influenced education. Mór Kármán’s Hungarian language and literature curricula show gradualism, which is rooted in rhetoric, and the efforts to develop the ability to synthesise.

The classical rhetorical tradition has accompanied Hungarian language cultivation from the beginning. István Geleji Katona’s *Magyar gramatikatska* (Small Hungarian Grammar) already includes answers to word choice and syntactic problems but subsequent rhetoric

works (Szvorényi, Szeberényi) are also based on the classical tradition. In the 20th century Lajos Lőrincze announced the so-called “anthropocentric” language cultivation instead of the “language-centred” or “germanism-centred” efforts. His work published in 1980 brought a change of mindset in the dissemination of linguistic knowledge. His writings featured the linguistic and language use related requirements included in the stylistic theories of classical rhetoric, and he considered such requirements the pillars of anthropocentrism. These are summarised in table 2 below.

<b>The fundamental requirements of anthropocentric language cultivation</b>	
<b>appropriacy</b>	“Language has not only grammar but also stylistics which is very important for language use: it determines what linguistic tools (style) can be used by the language user in a given time.”
<b>proper language use</b>	“Practicability, consideration, taste and linguistic instinct are of key importance here. So, proper language use is not a matter of grammar but of stylistics” (Zsigmond Simonyi)
<b>clarity</b>	Democracy requires a plain and clear expression of thoughts which is also advocated by language cultivation.

2. table: *The fundamental requirements of anthropocentric language cultivation*

Lőrincze’s important argument (shared with e.g. Horatio) is that the basis of language norm is usage (usus).

Language cultivation is a type of language planning (Sándor 2006). Its methodology received heavy criticism at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries but several linguists defended the activities of language cultivation (Balázs 2005, Kemény 2007), in fact, a Hungarian language strategy was also developed at the beginning of the 21st century (Balázs 2001).

By the 21st century language cultivation has arrived at its starting point: style-centred language cultivation evokes the classical rhetorical traditions; when it calls attention to the primacy of adequate language use, it reminds us of the classical stylistic virtues of appropriacy, clarity and proper language use. This also demonstrates that language cultivation is closely linked to the system of rhetoric.

It is also an important discovery, that linguistic fastidiousness is not only present in classical rhetoric but also in illiterate tribal cultures (Kennedy 1998): many rites, and tribal traditions

are known that confirm that the effort toward sophisticated language use is an elementary (anthropologic) need.

## **5. Main arguments**

**a.** Language cultivation as an applied linguistic activity is rooted in rhetoric. The works of all prominent rhetoric authors of the antiquity contain remarks on proper and sophisticated language use and requirements for learning proper speech. All of them, without exception, are discussed in the chapters relating to style (*elocutio*) and can be connected with stylistic virtues. There are four stylistic virtues: appropriacy, clarity, proper language use and elegance (Adamik et al 2005). Of these, proper language use can be related to grammatical correctness: word choice and syntactic issues. The requirements of proper language use were first incorporated in the system of rhetoric by Aristotle and elaborated in detail by Quintilian who termed word mistakes as barbarisms and syntactic mistakes as solecisms (Adamikné 2013).

**b.** Rhetoric survived even after the fall of the antiquity. It merely took new forms: rhetoric were applied and taught in monasteries and Church institutions. The rhetoric tradition also spread to the East which largely contributed to its survival. The famous Baghdad School was also built on Neoplatonism and Aristotle's doctrines (Maróth 1980).

**c.** As a novelty in the early Middle Ages, rhetoric appeared in churches without any antecedent. St. Augustine's work contributed to the emergence of the discipline of semiotics and the development of church rhetoric (Adamik 1998). Some early medieval thinker, including Alkuin who was a teacher in Charlemagne's court, also dealt with rhetoric and wrote several works in the subject which served as the basis of their teaching activity (Adamik 2014a, 2014b). Latin teaching in the Abbey of Saint Gall is a good example of the renewed rhetoric as it was based on reading out loud and gaining precise knowledge of the Latin grammar (Grotans 1997). Rhetorical thinking in the Middle Ages reached its height in the mature scholasticism of John of Salisbury.

**d.** Rhetoric lived on in the Renaissance era but in this period it can be examined primarily as behavioural and linguistic requirements for courtiers (Adamik et al 2005). The most studied antique works in the era were Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Cicero's *De Oratore* and *Orator* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* . Another significant work from this period is Castiglione's

*The Book of the Courtier*, a collection of dialogues which presents courtly manners through a group conversation. Castiglione condemns linguistic snobbery, uneducated language use and the standardisation of resulting incorrect linguistic forms, at the same time he emphasises the integrity of thought and word which clearly links back to the classical concept of rhetoric.

e. The principles of language use of classical rhetoric reached Hungary as well. Rhetoric thinking greatly influenced language cultivation and education from the onset of the Reformation to the second half of the 20th century. The emergence of national languages and primarily vulgar varieties marked the beginning of thinking about Hungarian language and proper language use resulting in the first work in the subject (published in Hungarian) by Mátyás Dévai Bíró *Orthographia ungarica* (Hungarian orthography) in 1538. The emergence of vulgar varieties is related to Greek philosophy and thinking (Szathmári 1968). This period marks the beginning of efforts to create Hungarian equivalents for foreign (technical) words (Fábián 1984). Rhetoric is still alive, and is present for example in guides to proper language use: István Geleji Katona's *Magyar gramatikatska* (Hungarian Grammar) is full of warnings and advices on word choice originating from classical rhetoric. Prominent figures of rhetoric of the age include Imre Pécseli Király and Lajos Szeberényi, József Szvorényi who follow the stylistic theories of classical rhetoric. There are other foreign influence as well. The thoughts and methods of British rhetorician Hugh Blair had a great impact on Hungarian rhetoric thinking from the 18th century.

f. The teaching of grammar and Hungarian language and literature in schools in the 19th century is based on the unity of thought and word: the structure of Mór Kármán's curricula follows the requirements set for speakers in classical rhetoric and uses the related concept of gradualism to synthesise knowledge acquired in Hungarian language lessons. Another component of the rhetorical foundations of teaching grammar is sentence analysis, a method which spread under German influence (Adamikné 2016), and which operates with rhetorical questions and argumentation (e.g. arguments taken from the circumstances, causal relationships etc.).

g. By the 21st century, language cultivation has returned to the starting point: we can talk about style-centred language cultivation (Kemény 2007). In classical rhetoric the examination of proper language use was based on stylistic theories and incorporated the most important principle of style-centred language cultivation: adequacy. Language cultivation underwent

several paradigm shifts before arriving at the style-centred approach (language-centred, anthropocentric etc.), so it has adapted to social needs. The anthropocentric approach, which was propagated by Lajos Lőrincze (Lőrincze 1980), was in fact based on classical stylistic virtues and the rules of language use and language policy determined by classical rhetoric: it primarily holds that proper language should be examined from a stylistic point of view, it keeps in mind proper language use based on grammatical considerations, and accepts *usus* as authoritative when determining language norm.

**h.** At the turn of the new millennium a draft of strategic language-related steps, a so-called language strategy was published (Tolcsvai 1996, 2004, Balázs 2001). At the same time, language cultivation came under heavy criticism. These critical opinions questioned the entire reason for the existence of language cultivation (Kontra 1999, Kálmán 2004, Cseresnyési 2005, Sándor 2001, 2006). Thus, language strategy created hierarchical levels of linguistic actions. Language cultivation can only be continued on scientific grounds and it should be organised by linguists (Balázs 2001). Géza Balázs later summed up the achievements of language cultivation in a polemical essay (Balázs 2005).

**i.** There is demand for language cultivation and the dissemination of linguistic knowledge even in the 21st century. This is clearly demonstrated by 20,000 questions submitted to the Office of Hungarian Language Services (Manyszi) mainly in relation to a spelling or usage problem. The Manyszi database is a constantly growing collection of naive linguistic questions and answers which tries to give 21st century response to the linguistic problems of language users.

**j.** The database analysis proved that the problems of proper language use, which were divided into word choice and syntax issues by Quintilian, are still present in the modern Hungarian language; people ask questions about them, express their opinion on them, and their questions reflect their attitude toward the new/unusual/unknown phenomenon.

**k.** In terms of spelling, the most frequent problems are related to writing words together or apart, while in terms of proper language use, the most commonly asked questions address word choice. The latter may be explained by the fact that the vocabulary is the most dynamically changing part of language (Gerstner 2006).

I. When people consider a phenomenon inappropriate, they usually express their attitude toward it in value-heavy expressions such as “I don’t like it” or “seems inaccurate” or “sounds more Hungarian to me”. Certain questions reflected the uncertainty of the language users. In such cases they expected the linguistic consultants to confirm or refute their opinion.

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